USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Deschutes National Forest
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Dear Reader:

The Forest Service would like to share its plans for the Ogden Landscape Vegetation Management Project. The general purpose of entering the project area is to move the area towards a more resilient landscape and provide a diversity of habitats closer to what historically occurred. We are considering treatments that will reduce forest density and fuels in order to promote and sustain late and old structured forest stands, and increase resilience to insects, disease, and stand-replacing wildfire. About 14,600 acres are proposed for commercial and non-commercial thinning, shrub mowing, and underburning.

The Ogden project area is located on the Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest; approximately 15 miles south of Bend, Oregon and adjacent to a portion of the east boundary of Newberry National Volcanic Monument (NNVM) (see Figure 1). The project area is bounded by Forest Road 9735 on the north, NNVM on the east, a portion of Forest Roads 22, 2215, and 2121 on the south, and federal and other lands on the west. The legal location is in Township 21S Range 11 and 12E and Township 22S Ranges 11 and 12E.

Purpose of and Need for Proposed Action

There are many high-value areas within and adjacent to the 26,520-acre Ogden: Paulina Creek which is an eligible Wild and Scenic River; popular recreation sites such as McKay, Ogden, and Prairie campgrounds and the Peter Skeen Ogden National Scenic Trail provide diverse opportunities for recreation; and the primary access into and out of Newberry Crater and the NNVM passes through the project area. The project area also provides habitat for northern goshawk and other Management Indicator Species. High fuel loads and the presence of ladder fuels put these areas at risk to a large scale wildfire.

Within the Ogden area, the amount of late and old structure (LOS) ponderosa pine is far below the historic range of variability. A majority of the planning area is second-growth ponderosa pine, which was established following historic logging in the 1920s through the 1940s. Portions of the area of have been thinned dating from the 1960s to as recently as 2009. In thinned and unthinned areas, tree growth is increasing stand density relative to stocking capacity of the site. Densities are affecting tree diameter growth and creating conditions favorable for mountain pine beetle attack. In some cases, lodgepole has been established and is adversely affecting the growth of ponderosa pine. There are also areas of dense lodgepole pine that are either mature stands, or have been regenerated in the past. Mixed conifer stands are a smaller component of the landscape and are comprised primarily of ponderosa pine with a mix of lodgepole pine and white fir.

> *There is a need to reduce forest vegetation density and fuels to increase resilience to insects, disease, and stand-replacing fire, and to increase the proportion of late and old structure (LOS) ponderosa pine.*

The general purpose of entering the project area is to move the area towards a more resilient landscape. Currently, values associated with the project area such as recreation sites, Old Growth Management Areas (OGMA), scenic views, and wildlife habitat are susceptible to wide-scale disturbances. The Forest Plan (as amended) supports proactive maintenance and enhancing the vigor of the forest in preventing a stand replacement event, rather than waiting (4-36). The area is below the historical range of variability (HRV) for LOS ponderosa pine. Past thinning has put stands on the trajectory towards becoming LOS in many

places. The purpose of this project is to maintain that trajectory. Where stands have not been thinned, the project will put them on that trajectory.

There is a need to contribute to the local and regional economies by providing timber and other wood fiber products and associated jobs.

The Forest Plan (as amended) supports management of timber resources and recognizes the value in a way that is consistent with other resource objectives, environmental constraints, and economic efficiency (LRMP 4-37).

The desired condition is a healthy forest with late and old structured stands that more closely approximates historic conditions. Desired characteristics include:

- Stand densities that reduce tree weakness and mortality related to insects and dwarf mistletoe, but retain these as desirable agents of a healthy functioning ecosystem;
- Stand densities that encourage the development and maintenance of large diameter trees, and open canopy structure;
- An arrangement of natural fuels such that in the event of a wildfire, the fire intensity and rate of spread would allow fire suppression options.

The actions proposed in the Ogden Vegetation Management Project are intended to move the project area toward the desired condition for the area. Treatments would reduce forest fuels in areas where fuel models indicate a high to moderate risk for stand replacement wildfire and treatment areas are strategically located across the landscape to break up fuel continuity and account for various values and features, such as Inventoried Roadless Area, National Monument, ingress/egress routes, Old Growth Management Areas, and wildlife corridors. Forest health treatments would reduce stand density to discourage infestation by beetles and slow the rate of spread within areas that are infected with dwarf mistletoe. Forest thinning associated with these treatments would enhance the health and growth of existing large trees as well as the development of future large trees that will contribute to late and old forest structure.

Management Direction

The Forest Plan, as amended, identifies a desire for the landscape to be resistant to uncharacteristically severe insect, disease and wildfire events, and for late and old structured stands to be maintained and/or increased on the landscape. The Forest Plan assigned the Ogden Landscape to the following Management Areas:

General Forest: The majority of the project area is General Forest (MA-8) where timber production is to be emphasized while providing forage production, visual quality, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities for public use and enjoyment. The objective is to continue to convert unmanaged stands to managed stands with the aim of having stands in a variety of age classes with all stands utilizing the site growth potential. This is achieved through stand treatments which include (but are not limited to) controlling stocking levels; maintaining satisfactory growth rates; protecting stands from insects, disease, and damage; controlling species composition; and regenerating stands that are no longer capable of optimum growth performance (LRMP, page 4-117).

Scenic Views: The project area contains retention and partial retention scenic views. The goal of scenic views management areas is to provide high quality scenery representing the natural character of central Oregon. The general theme and objectives of scenic views is for landscapes seen from selected travel routes and use areas are to be managed to maintain or enhance their appearance. Scenic Views corridors are located along Paulina Creek, Road 21, and on McKay Butte.

Old Growth: The Old Growth MA-15 forest is to be managed to provide 1) large trees, 2) abundant standing and downed dead trees, and 3) vertical structure except in LP where a single canopy is common. One OGMA is located along a portion of Paulina Creek.

Eligible Wild and Scenic River: A segment of Paulina Creek just downstream of Paulina Lake is considered eligible to be a Wild and Scenic River because it is free-flowing and possesses two outstandingly-remarkable values (Hydrological/Geological and Scenic). The corridor, which mostly overlaps MA-15 (Old Growth) will be managed in accordance with designated Wild and Scenic Rivers direction until further study is completed and the Forest Plan is amended.

This project area is also managed under the Revised Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales, also known as the Eastside Screens. The Eastside Screens contain guidelines for management of timber sales in LOS relative to the Historic Range of Variability (HRV), wildlife corridors, snags, coarse woody debris, and goshawk management. The HRV determination helps to avoid management activities which move conditions away from the HRV.

The Deschutes LRMP was also amended in 1995 with direction from INFISH for managing land near water. Interim direction is in the form of riparian management objectives, standards and guidelines, and monitoring requirements. This direction applies to the Riparian Habitat Conservation Area (RHCA) for Paulina Creek (496 acres) or to areas outside the RHCA that could degrade it.

Treatment Objectives and Proposed Activities

Given the project objectives listed above, the Forest Service proposes to employ overstory removal, shelterwood, commercial thinning harvests, small-diameter thinning, shrub mowing (bitterbrush, manzanita, and snowbrush), underburning, and slash piling and burning in different combinations across approximately 14,639 acres of the 26,521 acres within Ogden planning area (Refer to Tables 1-4). Figure 2 displays the treatment objectives and Figure 3 displays the proposed vegetation treatment. All harvest and thinning will be followed by activity slash treatment.

Table 1: Lodgepole Pine Stands, Even-aged

Treatment Objectives	Proposed Treatment	Acres
Continue development toward even-aged stands of an intermediate age/size class. Minimize mistletoe spread to developing young lodgepole pine.	Mechanical removal of lodgepole pine seed trees less than 21 inches dbh. Mechanical and/or hand thinning of understory trees, with possible removal of biomass.	1,035
	Mechanical and/or hand thinning with possible removal of biomass. Mechanical shrub treatment in some stands (89 acres).	332
Continue development of an intermediate age/size class. Maintain existing vertical diversity for wildlife habitat.	Hand/mechanical thinning of understory trees with no anticipated biomass removal.	234
Create a new age class of trees. Reduce spread of dwarf mistletoe to adjacent, recently regenerated stands.	Mechanical removal of most lodgepole pine less than 21 inches dbh, retaining some widely dispersed lodgepole pine for seed production. Hand felling of undesirable whips. Machine piling of excess fuels.	336
Total		**1,937**

Table 2: Mixed Ponderosa Pine and Lodgepole Pine Stands, Even-aged and Uneven-aged

Treatment Objective	Proposed Treatment	Acres
To move towards ponderosa pine dominated stands and continue development towards an intermediate age/size class.	Hand/mechanical thinning of trees with no anticipated biomass removal. Mechanically reduce shrub density.	21
	Mechanical removal of live LP overstory trees <21 inches dbh. Mechanical and/or hand thinning of understory trees, with possible removal of biomass.	20
	Mechanically reduce shrub density.	42
To move towards ponderosa pine dominated stands and continue development towards large tree structure.	Mechanical removal of live LP overstory trees <21 inches dbh. Mechanical and/or hand thinning of understory trees, with possible removal of biomass.	66
	Mechanical thinning and removal of LP and PP <21 inches. Additional treatment includes mechanical shrub treatment (42 acres), and a combination of Mowing/Underburning (3,119 acres).	3,003
	Within RHCA along Paulina Creek, mechanical and hand thinning of LP and PP <21 inches dbh. Post-thinning underburn.	3
Move towards PP dominated stands and maintain large tree structure.	Mechanical thinning and removal of LP and PP <21 inches. Post thinning treatment a combination of Mowing/Underburning.	175
Total		**3,330**

Table 3: Ponderosa Pine Stands, Uneven-aged with Large Trees

Treatment Objective	Proposed Treatment	Acres
To maintain or increase ponderosa pine dominance and continue development towards an intermediate age/size class.	Hand thinning of trees with no anticipated biomass removal. Mechanically reduce shrub density (1,108 acres).	1,213
	Mechanical removal of live LP overstory trees <21 inches dbh. Mechanical and/or hand thinning of understory trees.	3
	Mechanical thinning and removal of LP and PP <21 inches. Post-thinning treatments include mechanical shrub treatment (278 acres), and mowing/underburning (19 acres).	322
	Mechanically reduce shrub density.	43
To maintain or increase ponderosa pine dominance and continue development towards a large tree structure.	Hand thinning of trees with no anticipated biomass removal. Mechanically reduce shrub density.	32
	Mechanical thinning and removal of LP and PP <21 inches. Post-thinning treatment is a combination of mowing/underburning (6,924 acres).	6,948
	Within RHCA along Paulina Creek, mechanical and hand thinning of LP and PP <21 inches dbh. Post-thinning underburn.	193
To maintain or increase ponderosa pine dominance and maintain large tree structure.	Mechanical thinning and removal of LP and PP <21 inches. Post-thinning treatment is mowing/underburning.	97
	Within RHCA along Paulina Creek, mechanical and hand thinning of LP and PP <21 inches dbh. Post-thinning underburn.	18
Total		**8,869**

Table 4: Mixed Ponderosa Pine and White Fire Stands, Even-aged and Uneven-aged

Treatment Objective	Proposed Treatment	Acres
To maintain or increase ponderosa pine dominance and continue development towards an intermediate age/size class.	Hand thinning of trees favoring ponderosa pine for retention. No anticipated biomass removal. Mechanically reduce shrub density.	20
	Mechanical thinning and removal of trees <21 inches. Favor ponderosa pine for retention. Post-thinning mowing/underburning.	5
To maintain or increase ponderosa pine dominance and continue development towards a large tree structure.	Hand thinning of trees favoring ponderosa pine for retention. No anticipated biomass removal. Post thinning mowing/underburning.	10
	Mechanical thinning and removal of LP, PP, and WF <21 inches. Favor PP for retention. Post thinning treatment includes mechanical shrub treatment (16 acres), and mowing/underburning (427 acres).	443
To maintain or increase ponderosa pine dominance and maintain large tree structure.	Mechanical thinning and removal of LP, PP, and WF <21 inches. Favor PP for retention. Post-thinning mowing/underburning.	25
Total		**503**

Connected Actions

Closely related actions to this project that will be included in the analysis in the EIS are: road maintenance, hazard tree removal, construction of temporary roads, and obliteration of temporary roads following project implementation.

Project design elements and site-specific mitigation measures will be developed during the analysis of individual activity areas to reduce or eliminate unwanted effects. Mitigation measures may include seasonal operating restrictions, subsoiling on ground based logging units, weed control and monitoring. Proposed machine piling would be conducted from existing roads and skid trails.

Preliminary Issues Identified

The interdisciplinary team has identified the following potential issue related to implementation of the proposed action:

Amount of area to be underburned within the Scenic Views foreground area is greater than that allowed by the Deschutes Forest Plan. As part of the project, prescribed burning would occur within scenic views, Management Area 9. LRMP Standard and Guide M9-90 states that " prescribed fires will be small, normally less than 5 acres,..." The desire is to underburn within units, including foreground views to reduce fire risk and improve public safety in the event of a wildfire. Burning much larger areas within foreground views is necessary to achieve this goal.

The proposed action overlaps other ongoing projects. Within the Ogden project area, there is ongoing geothermal exploration. There is also a planning effort underway to designate OHV trails. These two projects will have wildlife disturbance effects that may make hiding cover less effective. Vegetation manipulation under the proposed action could create cumulative effects.

Other issues may arise from this public scoping opportunity or as the analysis progresses.

Invitation to Comment

We are informing you about this proposal so that you can provide comments to us. Your comments will be considered and used to identify issues associated with the proposal, so please keep them as specific as possible. They will also become a matter of public record. The planning process will include considering input we receive, as well as conducting any necessary surveys for wildlife, sensitive plants, heritage or other resources. A notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register on December 30, 2009, and we expect to have a Draft EIS available for review later this year. There will be an opportunity to comment again at that time.

Written or verbal comments are both welcome and should be returned to us by February 12, 2010. Written comments should be addressed to Shane Jeffries, District Ranger, at the address on this letterhead. We will also accept correspondence at the following email address:

comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us. Please put "Ogden Scoping Comments" in the subject line of your email. If you have any questions, additional information can be provided by Beth Peer, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, at 541-383-4769.

Sincerely,

A. SHANE JEFFRIES
District Ranger